Western Connecticut State University
Strategic Planning Steering Committee

Environmental Scan Subcommittee
Final Report

April 2015
Revised November 13, 2017

Prepared and Submitted by:

Veronica Kenausis, Director of Library Services (Chair)
Ann Atkinson, Associate VP for Academic Affairs (Steering Committee Co-Chair)
Dan Barrett, Psychology (Steering Committee Co-Chair)
Maranda Cox, Undergraduate
Russell Hirshfield, Music
Catherine O’Callaghan, Education & Educational Psychology
Gary Skiba, Accounting
Table of Contents

Executive Summary

I. Introduction & Method ........................................................................................................1

II. External Scan ...................................................................................................................3
   1. Who is going to college in the future? Demographic Projections ........................................3
   2. What will future students want to study? Industry & Employment Projections ......................8
   3. What will they expect in the classroom and on campus? Pedagogical, Technological, and Services
      Projections .......................................................................................................................11
   4. What economic, financial, political, and social challenges lie ahead? ..................................15

III. Internal Scan ..................................................................................................................20
   1. How has Western’s student body changed? ........................................................................20
   2. Which undergraduate and graduate programs are thriving, and which are struggling? ........23
   3. How satisfied are our current students? .............................................................................27

IV. Summary & SWOC Analysis .........................................................................................28

V. Figures and Data .............................................................................................................30

VI. Appendix .......................................................................................................................30
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is clear Western needs to offer relevant, dynamic, and innovative curricular and co-curricular opportunities, in line with national trends, in order to attract and retain modern students of traditional and non-traditional ages. There is a significant need to address pedagogical, technology, and service infrastructure issues to provide the emerging student population with desired program and support options, and to bring the university up-to-date with trends in engagement practices.

The External Scan shows that the drawing pool for students of traditional college age – 18-24 year olds – will not change significantly over the next 10 years, especially given that most enrolled students are from Danbury and the immediate area. The population of non-traditional students is projected to grow over the same period, and they may bring with them new and diverse challenges for the university. Program offerings need to be updated and enhanced to respond to trends and projections for future career and job growth opportunities. State support of public higher education is predicted to continue to decline, and students will be required to absorb more of the cost burden.

The Internal Scan confirms that overall enrollment at Western has decreased by 9% over the last 6 years, and that graduate population has been the hardest hit, declining by nearly 30%. The undergraduate majors that have experienced the greatest declines are history, American studies, and education (primary and secondary). Programs that have seen moderate or significant growth include HPX, nursing, and computer science. There is only one graduate program that has demonstrated significant growth over the last 5 years – nursing. All others have shown marked declines in enrollment, the greatest in biology and education. Overall retention and graduation rates, while showing slight improvements, are cause for concern when measured against our comparator institutions.
I. INTRODUCTION & METHOD

The Value of a College Degree

The question of whether a college degree provides a value above and beyond its cost is one that has been asked by parents, students, politicians, employers, and others. Unfortunately, attempts to answer this question are often reduced to a financial analysis of the costs of going to college compared to economic returns. Such analysis ignores the significant benefits derived from a college education to include quality of life, enlightenment, citizenship, and nonmonetary social mobility.


Abel and Dietz concluded that, despite the increasing cost of a college education and stagnant, if not declining, wages for those with a college degree, the return on a college degree has held steady during the 21st century. They found that while wages of college graduates have remained stable, wages of those without a college education have fallen precipitously, creating an all-time high for the college wage premium. The college wage premium is the excess of expected wages for college graduates versus expected earnings of those with just a high school degree. The decline in compensation for those with just a high school diploma also contributed to a reduction in the opportunity cost for lost wages while attending college.

Western excels with respect to ROI; in a 2014 study by financial site PayScale, Western was ranked second among all in-state public colleges and universities in Connecticut, seventh of the 19 public and private institutions that offer degrees in the state, and falls within the top one-quarter of all in-state public universities in the nation in terms of ROI.

Additionally, the Pew Research Center published a report in February 2014 entitled The Rising Cost of Not Going to College, in which they found that, according to Millennials themselves, “On virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment—from personal earnings to job satisfaction to the share employed full time—young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education.”

Finally, PayScale and CollegeNET recently (2014) combined efforts to create a social mobility index (SMI) to “comparatively assess the role of our higher education system in providing a conduit for economic and social advancement.” The SMI survey measured five factors related to higher education: cost of tuition, opportunities provided to low-income students, graduation rate, early career salary for

graduates, and the status of the university’s endowment. Based on SMI, Western ranked first in Connecticut and eleventh nationwide out of more than 530 colleges and universities.

While Western has many recent accomplishments to tout, including at least four Fulbright Scholars, several major gifts, as well as thriving programs and partnerships, the challenges for higher education (and public higher education, in particular) are significant. To address the issues of declining enrollments and financial challenges, Western has embarked on a renewed strategic planning initiative that will inform and create a new vision and direction for the university. A crucial step in the planning process is to assess the institution’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC) in the context of local, regional, state, and national trends. With this environmental scan we are attempting to set the stage for strategic planning to help us move in a direction that capitalizes on our successes, respects our past, and sustains our future.

In order to understand our position in the broader regional higher education environment, statistical information for 10 comparator institutions is included when appropriate. These comparator institutions were selected based on similarities in enrollment, staff, and budget size; physical location in the respective state; mix of academic programs; and historical mission.

- Christopher Newport University, Newport News, VA
- Plymouth State University, Plymouth, NH
- Keene State College, Keene, NH
- Fitchburg State University, Fitchburg, MA
- Rutgers University-Camden, Camden, NJ
- Rhode Island College, Providence, RI
- Westfield State University, Westfield, MA
- Worcester State University, Worcester, MA
- Framingham State University, Framingham, MA
- Frostburg State University, Frostburg, MD
II. EXTERNAL SCAN

1. Who is going to college in the future? Demographic Projections

National projections show that the population of traditional-age college students is declining. While it’s true that the numbers of high school age students/graduates are decreasing, the Education Department actually projects that college attendance will increase by 2022, although there will still be a slowdown in enrollment growth.

“Nearly three million more people will be enrolled in American colleges and universities in 2022 than were enrolled in 2012, according to Education Department projections released Thursday. That would represent a significant slowdown in enrollment growth over the next decade compared to the last one, but the projection is still aggressive given that the traditional college-age population is expected to decline over the same period.”

The projections indicate that the demographic profile of the national college populations is poised to change significantly, with a greater number of non-traditional age students enrolling and seeking degrees. The pool from which Western draws the majority of its students does not precisely mirror that national population, especially given that the university draws well over 90% of its enrollees from the state of Connecticut. Therefore, it is important to examine our traditional age population, the non-traditional age population, and possible “niche” markets (e.g., veterans, international students). We’ll begin with the traditional age population and focus on local, state, and regional projections.

A. Traditional Age/High School Students

Danbury High School

Danbury High School accounts for 17.5% of Western’s student body in a typical year. According to a study commissioned by the Danbury Board of Education, this high school population is expected to grow, although only slightly, over the next 10-15 years. Realistically, this means that the university’s largest “feeder” population for undergraduate students will remain essentially unchanged in terms of numbers (see Figure 3 and full report in Figures & Data).

---

State of Connecticut

Western draws 76.5% of its total enrollment from outside Danbury, but within Connecticut, and 26.3% from the immediately surrounding towns of Bethel, Brookfield, Newtown, New Fairfield, and New Milford. The graduating population in Connecticut in general is projected to decline⁴, suggesting that competition for students from other state institutions will be fierce in the coming years.

Regional

Looking beyond Connecticut’s borders to find sources of additional enrollment of traditional college-age students has been and will be challenging, given that the high school populations of our neighboring states are predicted to decline more and faster than in Connecticut.⁵ The numbers of students who enroll at Western from Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York are negligible even though those states have historically been net exporters of college students. However, statistics from an unpublished internal report prepared by an ad hoc committee of the CSCU system finds that “58 percent of U.S. high school graduates go to a college within 100 miles of their hometown. Given Connecticut’s proximity to other states that export large numbers of college students, the universities believe that with the correct price point for tuition and fees, marketing, and admissions effort we can increase the number of out-of-state students.”⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual and projected percentage changes in public high school graduates, by region and state: School years 2004-05 through 2022-23</th>
<th>Projected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2009-10 to 2022-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>-2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the challenges Western faces in recruiting out-of-state students – especially those in neighboring New York counties – is the in-state vs. out-of-state tuition differential. Given Western’s physical location in Connecticut and proximity to New York, students living only miles apart pay vastly different tuition rates ($5,169.50 for in-state students, vs $11,037.00 for out-of state).⁷ There have been a number of attempts to request special tuition rates from the Board of Regents for students in border states (New York, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey), thus far unsuccessful.

⁶ See Transform 2020 Report on Recruiting Out-of-State Students in the Appendix
Next we turn our attention to non-traditional age students.

B. Non-Traditional Age Students

Although high school enrollments and graduation rates are overall expected to decline, 3 million additional students are expected to be in college in the next 10-15 years, an increase of 14%. The reason for that projection is clear: the number of people aged 25-34 and 34-50 who choose to go “back” to college is projected to increase by 20% and 23%, respectively, as shown in the Figure 6.

The Center for Law and Social Policy also finds that “today’s typical college student is no longer an 18-year-old recent high-school graduate who enrolls full-time and has limited work and family obligations. Students today are older, more diverse, and have more work and family obligations to balance.”

In our region, the overall populations of the non-traditional age students are projected to decline, with the exception of Danbury, which is predicted to grow by 4%.

However, since these have not typically been Western’s demographic (median undergraduate age at Western is 22 – see internal scan section for additional information), the decline in population may not be relevant.

---


Finally, a 2011 American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) report asserts that that several characteristics – not just age – could characterize “nontraditional” students of the future, including:

- entry to college delayed by at least one year following high school,
- having dependents,
- being a single parent,
- being employed full time,
- being financially independent,
- attending part time, and
- not having a high school diploma.

The report goes on to say that “reentry adults’ multiple roles and commitments increase the likelihood they will look for degree and certificate programs that provide them flexibility in time and locations for both course completion and for access to key student services.”

Innovative programs and support services such as distance education, prior learning assessment, and accelerated course formats are discussed as possible ways to recruit and retain this growing population.

Next, we discuss two niche populations that can be both of traditional and nontraditional age and are more easily identified by a specific experience or a particular location: veterans and international students.

C. Niche Students

Veterans
The number of veterans taking advantage of the variety of educational support programs provided by the military has been steadily increasing over the last 13 years, from merely a handful to nearly 200 in Fall 2014. Appealing to this special population could prove to be a rewarding endeavor for Western. The university has already begun to build structures to meet the needs of this growing niche market by appointing a veterans affairs coordinator in December 2013.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of Veterans Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries by Geography</th>
<th>FY2000 to FY2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiscal Year</td>
<td>Total Beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2,757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>2,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5,103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>6,967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


International Students

The CSCU Out-of-State recruitment report suggests that the drawing pool for international students in general is increasing\(^\text{12}\); this information is corroborated by the Open Doors 2013 Fast Facts report that shows a steady and significant increase in foreign students coming to the United States to obtain a degree. Western’s international student population has, unfortunately, decreased over the last six years, and currently stands at 15 students.

A second report prepared by NAFSA: Association of International Educators finds that the international population is expected to grow in the future: “Generalizing across the three reports, the outlook is increased demand for international post-secondary education between now and 2020. Demand for English language-based post-secondary education is likely to increase by 750,000.”\(^\text{13}\)

---


\(^{13}\) *International Education Supply and Demand: Forecasting the Future.* N.p.: NAFSA.
2. What will future students want to study? Industry & Employment Projections

It is important to be mindful of this generation of students’ expectations and motivations for seeking a degree. As early as 2012, results from the American Freshman Survey indicated that students’ primary motivation to go to college is to “be able to get a better job” or make more money.\(^{14}\) In the most recent survey (2014)\(^{15}\), that number reached 86.1%, followed by getting “training for a specific career” at 77.1%, and then gaining “a general education and appreciation of ideas” at 70.6% (see Figure 13). While the liberal arts goal of educating students who think critically and creatively, solve problems by conducting research and writing about it, speak persuasively about carefully considered positions is essential, it is clear that the ultimate goal for students is employability.

The vast majority of Western graduates stay in Connecticut to start their careers (the 2011 President’s Economic Impact Report puts this number at 81%\(^{16}\) and recent surveys of home addresses of graduates suggests that the current percentage is at 88.5%). In view of this statistic, an assessment of the future employment landscape is necessary if Western hopes to create, maintain, or revise programs to meet future occupational needs so that students who succeed in college will also succeed in the job market.

---


Projected Employment for College Graduates in Connecticut

According to the Connecticut Department of Labor, the following occupations will see more than 20% growth in the next 10 years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Title</th>
<th>Employment 2012</th>
<th>Projected 2022</th>
<th>Net 2022</th>
<th>Percent Change 2012-2022</th>
<th>Annual Openings</th>
<th>Minimum Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>1,037</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market Research Analysts and Marketing Specialists</td>
<td>8,199</td>
<td>8,448</td>
<td>2,56</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Financial Advisors</td>
<td>4,924</td>
<td>6,243</td>
<td>1,319</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logisticians</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>1,305</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Developers, Systems Software</td>
<td>4,057</td>
<td>5,123</td>
<td>1,066</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Systems Analysts</td>
<td>8,579</td>
<td>10,584</td>
<td>2,005</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software Developers, Applications</td>
<td>7,347</td>
<td>9,239</td>
<td>1,982</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statisticians</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmospheric and Space Scientists</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Service Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Educators</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Counselors</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>2,357</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family Therapists</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Counselors</td>
<td>2,711</td>
<td>3,276</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors, All Other</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education, Training, and Library Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teachers, All Other</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Instructors and Teachers, Postsecondary</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapists, All Other</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>597</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Trainers</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician Assistants</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>2,270</td>
<td>1,154</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Practitioners</td>
<td>2,699</td>
<td>3,428</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Anesthetists</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>501</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse Midwives</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Therapists</td>
<td>1,819</td>
<td>2,185</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Master's degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: This table was edited to remove those occupations that do not require postsecondary education, and all engineering professions. The complete list of occupations and projected growth is included in the appendix, with an initial review of feasibility for Arts & Sciences at Western.
Projected Employment For College Graduates Nationally

At the national level, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the occupations that will grow the most will be in the healthcare field:

Table 1.1 Employment by major occupational group, 2012 and projected 2022
(Numbers in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total, All Occupations</td>
<td>145,365.8</td>
<td>160,983.7</td>
<td>15,618.0</td>
<td>$34,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Support Occupations</td>
<td>4,110.2</td>
<td>5,286.0</td>
<td>1,175.8</td>
<td>$25,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations</td>
<td>8,049.7</td>
<td>9,782.6</td>
<td>1,732.9</td>
<td>$60,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service Occupations</td>
<td>3,375.6</td>
<td>4,496.5</td>
<td>1,121.9</td>
<td>$20,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical Occupations</td>
<td>3,814.7</td>
<td>4,500.5</td>
<td>685.8</td>
<td>$79,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Service Occupations</td>
<td>2,374.7</td>
<td>2,732.4</td>
<td>357.7</td>
<td>$40,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations Occupations</td>
<td>7,167.6</td>
<td>8,066.7</td>
<td>899.1</td>
<td>$62,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational, Training, and Library Occupations</td>
<td>9,115.9</td>
<td>10,131.7</td>
<td>1,015.8</td>
<td>$44,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Occupations</td>
<td>1,247.0</td>
<td>1,375.8</td>
<td>128.8</td>
<td>$57,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations</td>
<td>1,249.1</td>
<td>1,374.8</td>
<td>125.7</td>
<td>$50,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Service Occupations</td>
<td>3,325.3</td>
<td>3,588.3</td>
<td>263.0</td>
<td>$39,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Related Occupations</td>
<td>15,105.0</td>
<td>16,200.5</td>
<td>1,095.5</td>
<td>$25,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management Occupations</td>
<td>8,861.6</td>
<td>9,490.0</td>
<td>628.4</td>
<td>$93,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media Occupations</td>
<td>2,570.9</td>
<td>2,751.6</td>
<td>180.7</td>
<td>$43,930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Occupations</td>
<td>9,841.9</td>
<td>9,017.5</td>
<td>726.6</td>
<td>$30,920</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Footnotes:


Figure 15

NOTE: This table was edited to remove those occupations that do not require postsecondary education, and all engineering professions.
3. What will future students expect in the classroom and on campus? Pedagogical, Technological, and Services Projections

Higher education in the United States continues to be in a state of transition from standardized, age-based residential programs to multiple customized pathways that embed online or blended learning (Ward, 2013). Traditional age college students (ages 18-24) are emerging from secondary school with expectations for immediate and constant feedback, as well as online course supports that universities may not be ready to deliver; anticipated changes in student demographics (ages 25-50), signify the need for greater flexibility in course delivery and scheduling. Market forces such as competency-based online credential coursework (e.g. Udacity) are predicted to compete with degree programs by 2020. In response to this market demand, some university pilot programs are beginning to emerge that explore higher education/industry partnerships to create products, knowledge, services with blended experiential learning.17

A. Pedagogies

Online and blended learning have been through iterations since the concept was introduced in the late 1990’s. The 2014 New Media Consortium (NMC) Horizon report finds that “online learning in general is in the midst of a long-term reinvention, with much learned from the recent forays into massive open online courses. While the focus within instructional design on genuinely matching the level of student engagement in face-to-face courses is increasing, online learning is still at least five years away from generating its maximum impact.”18 Western has garnered significant experience in online graduate education through the doctorate in nursing education that is offered almost entirely online. The undergraduate online/hybrid presence, however, having experienced growth in 2011, has declined in recent years.

Innovative Practices in Online or Blended Learning

We present here methodologies and applications that are anticipated to have the greatest impact on learning, although they may not all be appropriate for Western.

Massive Online Open Coursework (MOOC): Despite the apparent decline of MOOCs in 2012, current trends indicate that public/private universities continue to explore how to create models of learning that incorporates them. A pilot project, funded by the Teagle Foundation and led by Dominican University in California with other higher education partners, blends a student pool enrolled in foundational online coursework that then transitions to residential programs on campus for the final two years.19

Personalized adaptive learning: Through the use of online adaptive software tools, incoming students are assessed regarding learning needs and a customized curriculum is created. Personalized pathways are created based upon students’ goals and priorities. Western has been using a version of this approach in the math emporium, which employs MyMathLab, an adaptive mathematics learning program supplied by Pearson.

Gamification: Gamification is the application of features from the gaming world (such us role-playing or earning of badges into the education setting to practice skills or to focus on problem solving). Real-world scientific application of this idea has been shown to be incredibly powerful. For example, the Guardian reports “In 2011, people playing Foldit, an online puzzle game about protein folding, resolved the structure of an enzyme that causes an AIDS-like disease in monkeys. Researchers had been working on the problem for 13 years. The gamers solved it in three weeks.” Traditional-age students entering colleges and universities in the next years will come with these collaborative online experiences and skills.

Innovative Models of Teaching
College and university teaching methods continue to evolve. We present here those teaching approaches that are anticipated to have the greatest impact on the academy in the future.

Optimized class time: Use of hybrid, blended models with flipped learning where students view course content online before class and then apply it through guided practice rather than the former large, lecture hall format for introductory coursework. Western’s Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) devoted a significant amount of time to learning about, and supporting, flipped classroom experimentation, including awarding several class technology grants to faculty who implemented the method, and maintaining a web page with useful links to learn more.

Cross-border programs: Multiple customized pathways are created when universities “cross the institutional borders” to partner with corporations, industries, or school districts to create customized programs for a specific credential (i.e., Starbucks and Arizona State University). Western’s departments of nursing, social work, and education all have long and successful experiences with clinical, community, and field placements.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): Also sometimes referred to as “credit for prior learning,” or CPL, the concept of awarding credit for experience and learning outside the college classroom is a challenging idea. However, a research report prepared by the American Council on Education states “In the early twenty-first century, there is greater awareness of a new set of student demographics that encompasses working learners with no postsecondary credentials.” With the predicted increase in this population, many institutions are now wrestling with policies to accommodate PLA and the costs for implementing an on-site program. For the near term, Western has decided to continue to have Charter Oak State

College evaluate and give credit for prior learning, and the student can then transfer the credit to Western. Although Western does not add revenue with this approach (these students do not pay tuition for credits earned via prior learning), devoting the additional staff time required to evaluate experiences locally is not currently feasible.

Innovative Models of Assessment

With blended learning and online modules becoming more commonplace, students are leaving digital footprints that can be used in an assessment system. As students post on discussion boards, complete online quizzes, instructors are provided with multiple sources of data to analyze student performance. The advent of Google glass and similar wearable technologies will also provide students with the opportunity to create ‘lifelogs’ that document their learning throughout the day and can be used for performance- or competency-based assessments. Investigating or implementing any of these models or tools, however, will require a significant investment in technology development and training, and may not be feasible with current levels of technology support.

Learner Analytics: Technology has also fueled data-driven instruction with the advent of learner analytics which are data dashboards used to track student learning from the moment they click the mouse in a course. Online-for-profit universities such as the University of Phoenix use learner analytics to customize content and materials for learners so that differentiated instruction is seamlessly integrated. Western’s current course management system – BlackBoardLearn – has limited abilities to create and maintain such dashboards, although future releases may address some of the high demand aspects in the near future.

B. Technologies

Technology has transformed – and will continue to transform – the educational process in the United States and around the world. The task for any institution of higher education is to identify the technologies that will aid the development and growth of that institution, while continuing to respect the institution’s values and mission. Students coming to higher education in the next 5-10 years will have had significantly different secondary education experiences than did their predecessors, especially in terms of technology. A recent visit to two area high schools – Danbury and Bethel – uncovered that technology usage for teaching and learning is pervasive, ranging from bring-your-own-device (BYOD) programs to Google School (a wholly online, cloud-based educational environment where students retrieve, complete, and submit assignments) installations to PowerSchool (an application through which students can check their grades/progress at any moment).

Mobile technologies: As the world of computing gets smaller and more distributed, so will educational technology. Students are more likely than ever to access information and resources, produce assignments, and check progress on their mobile devices. A 2014 study by THE Journal finds that “Sixty percent of students are using mobile devices for anytime research, 43 percent for educational games and 40 percent for collaboration with their peers. Thirty-three percent of students surveyed use mobile devices for reminders and alerts related to their academic lives, 24 percent for taking photos of their assignments, and 18 percent for in-class polling.” The advantage is that faculty can deliver

---

27 Ontario Online Learning Portal for Faculty & Instructors. (2014). *A new pedagogy is emerging and online learning is a key contributing factor.*


content, and students can produce content, anywhere and any time. The challenge is that systems and services need to develop in such a way that mobile access can be expected and respected, services can be delivered in a wireless environment, and displays are developed that will be attractive on either a large or small screen. The use of mobile devices in primary and secondary classrooms is becoming normalized, with many school districts instituting BYOD programs, or providing students with tablets. Students are coming out of elementary and secondary schools with the expectation that they can/will use the device in their hands for everything – all of their social, educational, transactional activities. Western has recognized the need to address this emerging expectation and has formed an ad-hoc University Senate E-Device Committee that is examining the issue.

**Social Networks:** Much has been written about the appropriateness of using social networks for educational purposes, but there is no doubt that social networking has become a force in personal lives and academia. Students rarely differentiate between their social network usage and their academic pursuits. The same *THE Journal* study referred to above finds that “Today’s students...are looking at social media not as a separate thing that you do occasionally but as a pervasive part of the way they are living their lives outside of school — one they want to connect with their lives inside the classroom.” Additionally, ubiquitous one-to-many technologies (e.g., Twitter, Instagram) are showing great potential for professional and educational communication purposes. Western has successfully harnessed some of these tools at the institution, school, and departments levels with Facebook pages, Twitter feeds, and Instagram accounts, and to a lesser degree at the course level, with some faculty maintaining specific Facebook pages for their classes.

**Open Education/Open Educational Resources (OER):** The emergence of open resources – such as textbooks, journals, statistics, databases, and software – is beginning to disrupt the educational publishing industry. These open resources can help address the financial concerns facing students that are detailed in the next section of the external scan. Western’s library is in the planning stages of bringing OER to campus, initially with open textbooks.

C. Services/Engagement

It is widely believed that an engaged student is a retained student. There have been myriad studies conducted and articles published that report on specific activities that aid in the endeavor to keep students at a particular institution. A 2008 study by Kuh et al. concludes that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college.”

Provost Jane Gates has formed a community engagement committee to assess current engagement activities, and recommend changes, led by Dr. Averell Manes. Members include teaching faculty, student affairs leaders, and university administration. Initial findings show that the department of social work has been at the forefront of academic departments providing extensive field experience for their students for years. Additionally, the Division of Student Affairs recognizes engagement as a top priority and conducted Western’s first “Day of Service” in fall 2014. Finally, the Provost’s office has led the effort to apply for the U.S. President’s Community Service Honor Roll for two years, and Western has achieved Honor Roll status in each.

---

Service Learning: Service learning is a course-based community project that meets the needs of the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Since the late 1990’s, American universities have expanded their curriculum to include these experiential opportunities beyond the professional schools and departments. Comprehensive service learning at the university includes planning, support services, administrative offices, and evaluation. US News and World Report now includes rankings of universities on service learning, specifically on the integration of service learning into academic program curricula. In comprehensive service learning projects, students, faculty, and the community are enriched through collaborative endeavors to improve lives or the environment. The Learning Reconsidered report, synthesizing the literature on desired curricular and co-curricular learning outcomes for college students, highlighted service-learning programs, with an emphasis on co-curricular experiences, as an example of how learning experiences on a campus can be integrated to help students achieve desired outcomes.

First Year Learning Communities/First Year Experience: In First Year Learning Communities (FYLC), freshmen with common interests reside and enroll in courses as a cohort. The FYLC experience helps entering college students form supportive social networks and access information about university processes and life. Several models of FYLC also include inviting guest speakers to host informational sessions in residence halls so that entering freshmen can begin career planning. For example, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln has expanded their offerings to include specific FYLC for each career pathway, including exploratory studies (http://learncom.unl.edu/firstyear).

Western has experimented with first year programs in the past, with limited success, but a new effort is taking shape on campus. With new leadership and a planning grant from the Davis Foundation, the university is poised to take this project to the next level. Designed to be an integrated/embedded first year program, regular 100-level general education courses will be transformed into FY courses and will include modules and information created to ease the transition to college. A nationally renowned first year scholar is visiting during spring 2015 to kick off the program, which will be piloted in Fall 2015 and implemented in Fall 2016.

Internships: Internships are either paid or unpaid positions in employment fields related to the academic major. According to US News & World Report, 37% of 2012 graduates interned during their college career, with many converting these placements into jobs. The increasing student demand for internships has resulted in a ranking by US News & World Report with Bennington College in Vermont leading the list by offering 100% of its students internship opportunities. Stanford University offers shadowing experiences in addition to internships to provide their students with multiple opportunities to learn marketplace skills. Western’s Career Development Center (CDC) coordinates on average 140 internships for credit yearly, although the number varies based on positions available, the economy, student resume and interview performance. Western is beginning to develop internships within academic departments, and the selective Hancock Student Leadership Program provides semester-long shadowing experiences for each student.

4. What economic, financial, political, and social challenges lie ahead?

A. Economic and Financial

**Rising Costs**

Students face three major challenges in paying for college: the current level of fees and tuition, declining state subsidy of public four-year colleges, and the use of student loans to finance college costs.

**Tuition and Fees**

Undergraduate tuition and fees at Western have increased 19.1% during the five-year period, with in-state increasing from $7,462 per year in 2010 to $8,893 in 2014, and out-of-state increasing from $17,154 to $20,398. In the aggregate, our comparator institutions have increased tuition and fees by 22%, with the highest being Christopher Newport at 35%, and the lowest being Frostburg at 12%.

Including the estimated costs of books, supplies and other on-campus expenses, the 2014-5 cost of attendance for an on-campus student paying in-state tuition for one year at Western is $23,426. The approximate cost of attendance for in-state commuters living on their own is $23,726 and $13,117 for those living with their parents.

Similar data for Western and its peer institutions shows that Western’s tuition and fees increased only slightly less than our peers over that same 10-year period.
Declining State Subsidies
As noted in a series of articles posted on the Chronicle of Higher Education in March of 2014, the nationwide trend has been a decline in state support of public higher education, requiring student tuition to cover a much larger portion of the cost of education.

The report shows that the trend in CT follows much the same pattern, as does the 5-year trend per FTE for Western, with state appropriations dropping from $8,198 to $7,571 and tuition increasing from $6,337 to $7,336.

When compared to our peer group, Western receives a higher portion of core revenue through state appropriations. In fact for Western, the state appropriations contributed the highest percentage of core revenue when compared to peers in fiscal years ending in 2011 and 2010.

State Appropriations as a Percentage of Core Revenue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Peer Group - Average</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Western</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Loans
While earning a college degree has been determined to be of value, rising costs and declining state subsidies are contributing to a growing crisis in paying for college with loans. Western students graduate with an average debt load of $25,948, slightly above the state average for 2013. Finding ways to alleviate financial burdens on students will remove one of the barriers to persistence and ultimate graduation.

---

36 The Institute for College Access & Success. College InSight.
Alternative revenue streams

Institutional Advancement

Public institutions are turning to private gifts to alleviate some of the financial pressure on institutions and students. A 2014 article in the Boston Globe concerning private giving to the University of Massachusetts system states that the “…fiscal landscape has made it more important than ever for public institutions here and around the country to focus on raising private money.” The same is true of Connecticut. Although state subsidies have not declined to the extent of some neighboring states, there is a need to focus on alternative revenue streams. New leadership in the Office of Institutional Advancement has brought energy to Western’s fundraising efforts. The prospect of increased funding through development sources will offset, in part, the financial strains that the university is facing as a result of decreasing enrollment and decreasing support from the state of Connecticut.

The Western Foundation endowment (2013) total is $15,860,324, a 24% increase since 2010. In 2013 the Western foundation net income was $1,989,661, a 42% increase from 2010. Among peer institutions, the average endowment is slightly higher, at $16,987,629.

Western is currently in the silent phase of a capital campaign with a goal of raising $17,500,000. $7,500,000 has been raised thus far, with major gifts from the Macricostas Family Fund ($3,000,000), Farooq and Farida Kathwari ($1,000,000) and Dr. Erland and Irene Hagman ($1,500,000).

The Board of Directors of the Western Foundation and the Vice President of Institutional Advancement are encouraged by this recent increase in giving and believe that the goals of the campaign will be reached during the public phase of the campaign, to be determined after the new university president is hired in July 2015.

The prospects for continuing to grow our endowment are good for the following reasons: committed leadership in the Office of Institutional Advancement; an active and generous Western Foundation Board; an improving economy; Western’s strong reputation in the community; the new Visual and Performing Arts Center.

Grants: Office of Sponsored Research Administrative Services

A second source of alternative funding in higher education is sponsored research or grants. Western has been actively pursuing outside monies through the office of sponsored research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Applications Submitted</th>
<th>Applications Funded</th>
<th>Total Amount of Grants Awarded</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>$1,063,288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$278,015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15 (to date)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>$109,066 (to date)</td>
<td>Awaiting response: $1,578,585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24

B. Political and Social

Western operates as a regional university of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), and is ultimately governed by the Connecticut state legislature. As such, all substantive institutional changes must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate legislative body in the state, thereby limiting the university’s ability to pivot quickly or pursue new endeavors. Moreover, the state universities were merged administratively with the state community colleges, and the combined entity is headed by a Board of Regents (BOR). Since its establishment in 2011, the CSCU has been plagued by structural instability, with the chairmanship of the BOR changing twice and the BOR Presidency changing three times.

The current President of the Board of Regents – Dr. Gregory Gray – has, however, announced a new emerging plan to improve and extend educational opportunities at the institutions. “Transform CSCU 2020” is a set of 36 initiatives that “will improve the student experience by uniting the 17 CSCU institutions as one interdependent system, strengthen online learning capacity, and better aligning coursework with the strongest industry growth sectors.” The plan has been met with some skepticism and is currently being reviewed and evaluated by the faculty at institutions in the system.

We will now move to the internal scan, analyzing Western and applying external factors to understanding our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges contextually.

---

II: INTERNAL SCAN

We present a statistical analysis of key university indicators over a 5-year period\(^{40}\) (2009-2014) compared to our selected peer institutions.

1. How has Western’s student body changed?

Evidence shows overall enrollment has decreased by 9% over the last 5 years, and that the graduate population has been the hardest hit, declining by nearly 30%. The undergraduate majors that have experienced the greatest declines are history, American studies, and education (both primary and secondary). Programs that have seen moderate or significant growth include health promotion and exercise science (HPX), nursing, and computer science. Only one graduate program has demonstrated significant growth over the last 5 years – nursing. All others have shown marked declines in enrollment, the greatest in biology and education. Low overall retention and graduation rates, while showing slight improvements, are cause for concern when measured against our comparator institutions.

**Enrollment**

Overall enrollment has decreased by 9% over the 5-year period 2010 to 2014, with undergraduate enrollment declining 6%, and graduate enrollment decreasing by nearly 30%.

Comparator institutions experienced an average decline of 3% over a 5-year period, with Plymouth State experiencing the greatest decline (16%) and Worcester State University increasing by 15%.

**Transfer Population**

[NOTE: We have data from 2009, 2010, and 2013 only\(^{41}\).] The Western transfer population appears to be growing in numbers and percentage of total population, averaging approximately 549 per year. In 2013, there were 567 transfers, accounting for just over 10% of the total student population, as compared to 2010 during which there were 523 transfers, representing 8% of the population. In 2009 most transfers came from out-of-state institutions, whereas in 2013, most were from the state community colleges.

---

\(^{40}\) All data provided by the Western Office of Institutional Research.

\(^{41}\) See Transfer Surveys in the Appendix
**Student Characteristics**

The percentage of in-state students has increased slightly over 5 years to a peak of 92.6% in 2014.

The undergraduate student population has seen a sharp increase in minority student enrollment: 13.4% enrolled in 2010, compared to 23.6% in 2014.

The student population has remained fairly steady in terms of gender and age:

- 55% female
- Undergraduate mean age = 22 years old
- Graduate mean age = 35 years old

**Student Preparedness**

SAT scores have remained virtually unchanged in the last 5 years, and are comparable to those of our comparator institutions over the same period.

**Residency**

The number of residential students has declined steadily over the last 5 years, culminating in an annual average of over 65% of students living off campus.

First year students account for the highest percentage of residential students at just over 50%, and seniors are the lowest percentage at just about 20%.
Retention & Graduation
After dipping to a low of 68.5% in 2012-13, the first-year retention rate (fall to spring) has increased by 5.8% to 74.3% in 2014, and increased dramatically this year with a fall-to-spring retention rate of 88.5% (excluding students who graduated in December). Our comparators have averaged approximately 77% retention rate over the same period.

Six-year graduation rates have improved, peaking in 2014 at 44%, as reported by IPEDS. However, Western’s six-year graduation rate is significantly below the comparator institutions that average 53.3%.

Western’s four-year graduation rate has improved over the five-year period, increasing from 13% in 2009, to 21% in 2013, but is still concerning, with a five-year average at 17.2%. The peer group’s five-year average is 32%, with the highest being Christopher Newport at 45.6%, and the lowest being Rhode Island College at 15%.

Faculty
The number of full-time faculty is currently 208, a 9.6% decrease since the high of 228 in 2012. This number mirrors the decline in the student population.

The part-time faculty FTE (full-time equivalent) is at a five-year high of 139. In 2011 the part-time FTE was 110.

The student to full-time faculty ratio in 2013 was 29:1. The lowest ratio during the five-year period was 27.1:1 (2012).

NOTE: NCES counts “Instruction, Research, and public service FTE”; the graph reflects the number reported in the IPEDS data. Western compares very favorably with our peer institutions, with ratios in the high teens, as opposed to ratios in the high 20s.

---

Calculated with a “moving wall” of students entering 6 years prior.
2. Which undergraduate and graduate programs are thriving, and which are struggling?

**Undergraduate Programs by School**

The Macricostas School of Arts & Sciences saw a 6% *increase* in majors, with the greatest growth in Computer Science, Media Arts, Economics, and Biology. The largest declines included American Studies, History, and Spanish.43

The Ancell School of Business had a 12% *decrease* in majors, with growth in only two programs – Justice and Law Administration (still the largest major at Western), and Management Information Systems. All others declined, with Marketing, Finance, and Management each decreasing more than 20%.

The School of Professional Studies declined by 24%, although there was significant growth in registered nursing (132%) and health promotion studies (89%). All education programs declined by 35% or more.44

The School of Visual and Performing Arts decreased by 5% overall, although the new programs in Musical Theater and Music, Audio and Production each grew more than 75% since their establishment in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

**Undergraduate by Program**

The bachelor’s programs with the highest enrollments are JLA, Psychology, Accounting, Biology, and Management, although Management has declined significantly over the last 6 years. NOTE: “Undeclared” is the largest major overall.

43 All student information reported in FTE.
44 This may be due, in part, to the overhaul of the education curriculum.
Health Promotion Studies and Registered Nursing have nearly doubled in size over the last seven years, and Computer Science has seen a marked increase in the last three years alone.

Three majors have declined by more than 50%: American Studies (-73%), Pre-Elementary Education and Pre-Secondary Education (-64% each). History and Spanish have decreased by 47% and 34%, respectively.
Graduate by School (FTE)\textsuperscript{45} The Macricostas School Arts & Sciences offers six master’s level programs in Biological & Environmental Sciences (parked since 2011), Earth and Planetary Sciences, English, History, Mathematics, and Creative & Professional Writing. Combined enrollment in these programs has declined by 46% over a six-year period.

The Ancell School of Business offers three master’s level programs in Business Administration, Health Care Administration (parked since spring 2013), and Justice Administration (parked, beginning in spring 2015). Combined enrollment has declined by 24%.

The School of Professional Studies (SPS) offers the greatest number of programs with four master’s level (counselor education, teacher education, secondary education, and nursing), one post-master’s certificate in applied behavior analysis started in 2013), and two doctoral programs in Instructional Leadership (established in 2003), and Nursing Education. Combined enrollment has declined by 50%. SPS also hosts the only graduate program that has grown over the last six years – the MSN program. The MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) was parked in fall 2014.

The School of Visual and Performing Arts offers 2 master’s level programs in Art (MFA) and Music Education. Combined, these two programs have declined by 39%.

\textsuperscript{45} All graduate information is presented in FTE.
Graduate by Program
The Ed.D. in Nursing Education and the PMC in Applied Behavior Analysis were established in 2012 and 2013, respectively, and both have shown growth since their inception. Nursing and Nursing Education have demonstrated the most growth among graduate programs.

The sharpest decline in graduate enrollment since Fall 2009 has been in teacher education programs.

Although graduate program enrollment has declined dramatically in all schools in the last six years, Education programs have been hardest hit with a decline of over 70% (excluding Biological and Environmental Sciences).

Figure 38

Figure 39

Figure 40
3. How satisfied are our current students?

The relatively newly formed Division of Enrollment Management has been studying the student population in order to ascertain the levels of student satisfaction and what influences a student’s decision to persist or leave. The most recent survey issued (Fall 2014) had an overall response rate of over 23% of the student population, and represented a cross section of full- and part-time students of various ages, GPA levels, residential status, classes, and majors.46

Results indicate several areas of significant concern (described as “pain points” in the executive summary): the student life experience; course availability; academic advisement; and the registration process. Of note:

- Student life received the lowest overall ratings, with 59% of respondents being neutral or dissatisfied when asked if they felt they were part of the university community.
- Academically, students expressed concern with course availability (33% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied), the registration process (nearly 1 in 4 of the respondents were dissatisfied), and advisement (46% were either neutral or dissatisfied).
- Overall, 65% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience at Western.

---

46 See Division of Enrollment Management Survey Executive Summary in the Appendix.
IV. SUMMARY & SWOC ANALYSIS

Evidence shows that the drawing pool for students of traditional college age – 18-24 year olds – will not change significantly over the next 10 years, especially given that most enrolled students are from Danbury and the immediate area. However, the notion of the “traditional” university student has dissolved. Only one in five students is now entering college at the age of 18, studying full-time and living on campus. The university must adapt to accommodate a student population that is older, more diverse, and more likely to experience a varied matriculation (full-time, part-time, continued study following a leave-of-absence, etc.).

It is clear Western needs to offer relevant, dynamic, and innovative curricular and co-curricular opportunities, in line with national trends and occupational projections, in order to attract and retain students. There is a significant need to address the academic technology infrastructure to provide the emerging student population with desired online support options and to bring faculty up-to-date with trends and modern teaching/engagement practices.

Based on the information presented in our external and internal scans, the committee has identified the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges for the university.

STRENGTHS
- Data indicates that since most of our student body has traditionally come from within Connecticut, and our greatest source of enrollees is Danbury High School, our enrollment drawing pool will remain relatively stable through 2021.
- Western has seen a marked increase in the diversity of its student population, reflecting the growing diversity in the Danbury and the greater region, which contributes to the multi-cultural environment on campus and is central to the university’s mission and to the cultural life on campus.
- The recent news of major gifts from the Macricostas, Hagman, and Kathwari families will have a positive impact on financial assistance for students.
- Western continues to receive substantial state support, relative to our comparator institutions.
- Costs for attendance remain competitive or better when looking at comparator or alternative institutions, and are in line with other regional and national standards. The cost for full time attendance continues to be relatively affordable for in-state students.
- According to the SAT scores of incoming students, Western continues to attract and enroll qualified students.
- Western’s most recent fall-to-spring first year retention rate has improved significantly this academic year.

WEAKNESSES
- The university has only partial control over tuition increases and changes in fee structures, making it challenging to offset financial shortfalls.
- Western’s retention and 4- and 6-year graduation rates lag behind our comparators and national averages, and affect our ability to stabilize tuition income.
- The ability to attract students from outside Connecticut historically has been limited.
- The current financial climate in the state of Connecticut makes it difficult to implement new programs that will require additional resources and personnel.

OPPORTUNITIES
- Projections for college enrollment from 2010-2021 include significant increases in students who are 25 and older, thereby creating an opportunity to focus special efforts to attract this relatively untapped population.
Western currently offers programs in many of the fields projected to grow in the local and national job markets and could consider modifying or extending program offerings to match future job market. According to Provost Jane Gates, Western has proposed only one new undergraduate program in the last three years, while our sister institutions have each proposed many more.

- The university and the system are investing heavily in upgrading technology infrastructure and can build on that foundation by integrating teaching and learning with new technologies.
- The institution can learn to adopt the power of social networking for educational purposes, as a communication tool, and employ the concepts of public sharing in the service of learning.
- Western is poised to attract more “niche” student populations such as veterans and international students.
- On average, 10% of Western’s student body in any one year is comprised of transfer students. Developing programs and support structures for this population could yield positive results.
- Studies show that exploring engagement activities, pedagogies, and support services that shift the university toward a student-centered environment will assist in retention efforts.
- Health-related fields and technology are likely to be the major areas of growth for graduate programs, areas in which we have strong programs.
- New York is the only state in the northeast expected to show an increase in the population, with a projected surge of 6% in high school graduates; Western borders New York State and early results from a plan to market aggressively in this area shows there is potential to capture a greater share of the undergraduate and graduate markets.
- The market need for retraining for emerging occupations could position graduate education to offset decreases in undergraduate enrollment.

CHALLENGES

- Students are more likely to commute, rather than reside in university housing, a fact that reduces revenues, impedes building community and student engagement, and complicates offering services at convenient hours.
- Approximately one-quarter of the current student population is from a historically underrepresented group, and that number is poised to grow. Western will need to assess and respond to the needs of this significant group.
- The university needs to address the challenges that older students are likely to encounter, including transfer of prior credits, work-family-school balance, and differences in approaches to learning and preferences.
- It is critical that the university continue to find alternative sources of revenue (in addition to state appropriations, tuition and fees) and build on the recent fundraising successes.
- While there are opportunities to expand programs in certain areas, the appropriate resources may be difficult to identify.
- The lack of systematic technology training and support, and instructional design services will impede Western’s progress in technology adoption and innovation. Western must re-think current structures and models for technology support.
- The attempt to offset the financial burden of attending university is overwhelming: most students must work to pay for college; academic success is hindered by employment commitments.

47 See Powerpoint from Dr. Gates in the Appendix.
48 See the WCSU Expansion market plan in the Appendix.
V. Figures & Data

Please visit http://libguides.wcsu.edu/enviroscan

VI. Appendix

Please visit http://libguides.wcsu.edu/enviroscan